

**FROM UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE**  
**ABILITIES by Lynn Zaritsky**  
**IF I COULD WALK IN YOUR SHOES**

Disability Awareness Day can be an unusual phenomenon. Sometimes those who otherwise do not have a disability “put on” a disability for this designated day. They borrow a wheelchair and wish for curb cuts and ramps, or they don blindfolds and stumble around their suddenly unfamiliar world.

At the end of the day, they get out of the wheelchair or take off the blindfold. The experience is over and a few lessons are learned. Just for one day, I would like to have a Non-Disability Awareness Day.

Just for one day, I would like to “take off” my disability. What a day it would be! Early in the morning, I would pull painlessly out of bed in something less than my usual half-hour, jump into my sweats and tug on my running shoes. Then I would delightedly scuff and mar the bottoms of those shoes, jogging down our street to the pond, aerobically inhaling the sweet autumn scent of my neighbors’ burning leaves.

Once there, I’d stretch out on my back on the grass next to the pond and listen to my heart pounding proudly in my ears, while staring up at the clouds pulling faces in the sky.

Home again, I would get in our car and drive. (Of course, I would be granted a driver’s license for this special day.) I’d go through all four gears within one block -- first gear! ...accelerate until a wind comes into the open window, jam the clutch in, pull the knob back to second gear! ... wind up the engine to third and forth gears! Brake down to a stop. Repeat for several blocks. I don’t know why I want to do this-it just feels good.

Pulling into the mall parking lot, I would choose the parking place farthest from the door and leisurely enjoy the distance. First thing, I would buy a chocolate ice cream cone. I could actually reach it when the clerk hands it over the counter to me. I would stroll, window shopping, while eating it. There would be no chocolate stains on my lap.

Then I would make my way over to the sporting goods store and buy a pair of soft leather hiking boots and a forest-green day pack. Boots on my feet, pack filled with goodies, I would then get back into the car, kidnap my husband from his work and my children from their schools, and head for the canyons.

We would hike deep into the wilderness. The trail would be narrow, steep, and rocky. We would jump over mossy trees fallen onto the trail, and ford small streams, the water chilling our feet. I would help my youngest climb the last few feet until we finally broke out into the clearing at the top of the mountain.

I would gather my family around a living wildflower bouquet for a picnic.

At home that evening, my Non-Disability Awareness Day nearing its conclusion, I would reflect on what it would be like not to have a disability. Taking off my boots, I realize that I might get blisters from time to time. I would have to be more careful about sunburn at higher elevations. Jogging to the pond was not as easy as I thought it might be. And I certainly could have done without that traffic citation for “erratic driving”. Good lessons.

My sojourn into life without disability didn't change me that much, however. I managed to get up and get dressed. I ate. I did spend the day doing some unusual things, for me, but then I sometimes do unusual things anyway. I am a reasonably good parent and would be still, even without my disability. When standing, I am taller than my husband but he still held my hand. All in all, I think I'd get used to the challenges of life without disability, given time. I would, after all, still be me.

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